TOESPRAAK EP VOORZITTER MARTIN SCHULZ, EUROPESE RAAD 15 OKTOBER 2015

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe is facing an epochal challenge with migration flows unseen since the Second World War as more and more people are fleeing from the brutal war in Syria. These days, the job at hand has become much tougher as we are encountering practical difficulties on the ground with the reception and accommodation of such high numbers of refugees. In some places the mood is even changing. For the time being luckily the "Willkommenskultur" is prevailing over growing fear and skepticism. But we cannot close our eyes to these difficulties. Most importantly, we need to take stock today of what we have already achieved in recent months and weeks and what we still must address as a matter of obvious urgency. The achievements must encourage us that by acting together, as Europeans, we are up to the challenge.

Together, we have created a joint search and rescue mission in the Mediterranean. Latvian helicopters, British vessels and the Italian Coast Guards have been saving lives in the Mediterranean, to pick only some examples among many.

Together, we are fighting human traffickers, who are making money out of the misery of people, whose lives they endanger by herding them on over-crowded rickety boats. Operation Sophia - named after a baby born on the ship which rescued her mother off the coast of Libya- will now allow the EU navy to board, search, seize, and divert vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking on the high seas. The UN Security Council gave the go-ahead to this last week.

Together, we are adapting our budget to the new challenges. Yesterday the European Parliament adopted the draft amending budget for the year 2015. We worked with great speed to provide the much needed additional staffing to Frontex, the asylum Support Office, and Europol to man the hotspots, to give but one example.

Together, we have increased the funding for humanitarian organizations helping refugees mostly in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The EU is the leading donor in the response to the Syrian crisis with a total of more than 4.2 billion Euros mobilized by the Commission and member states. At the Informal Summit on 23 of September you pledged at least an additional one billion Euros for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Program and now must deliver on our humanitarian commitment. Not making available funds which were pledged here would be dramatically negligent - please make sure that the funds are made available.

Together, we have agreed on relocating 40.000 and then 120.000 people in clear need of international protection. And we were fast: on 9 September, the Commission made the latest proposal. The following week the European Parliament gave its approval. One week later the Council, by a very large

majority, adopted the decision. This was an important step: for the first time we agreed on binding targets and a binding distribution among member states for relocation. And only two weeks later we are operational: we are setting up so-called hot spots in Italy and Greece. Last Friday the relocation scheme got under way the when the first Eritrean refugees left Italy on a plane to Sweden. But let us be honest: these are only first steps. We need a binding permanent system for relocation. European solidarity is about sharing responsibilities and leaving no one alone.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Now, that reality has rendered the Dublin system obsolete, we have the choice between stumbling from one crisis to the next and patching together short-term remedies for individual aspects - or to come up with a comprehensive solution anchoring permanent solidarity. With political will and leadership we can manage this crisis, minimizing the risks and capitalizing on the opportunities.

Last May, through his Agenda on Migration, President Juncker proposed such a comprehensive and durable solution. The European Parliament is prepared to do what is needed to provide Europe with a migration and asylum policy for the 21st century. We hope you will deliver, too.

For some time, the European Parliament has been calling for a genuine European Common Asylum System. To date this only exists on paper although it was launched 15 years ago. Now it's high time to revise Dublin and develop a genuine EU Asylum System.

And on many occasions we have urged you to progress on legal migration. The reality is that Europe is a continent of migration. We must accept this reality and deal with it responsibly by developing a migration system with clear rules about who can come and who cannot come. What Europe needs is an ambitious immigration law, not a limited review of our already limited instruments.

We will work intensively with the Council on a common list of safe countries – it makes no sense in a single area of justice, liberty and security to have a variety of contradictory lists; President Juncker made the point in his State of the Union address to the European Parliament that it also makes no sense that one country can at the same time claim to be a candidate country and not be considered safe. And in this regard it is clear that recent events in Turkey have a heightened influence on the debate on Turkey's status as a safe country.

Last week your home affairs ministers discussed returns. Returns are part and parcel of a responsible migration policy. To be able to give refugees the protection they deserve, also means returning those who have no right to asylum. Parliament believes that the implementation of the Return Directive should go hand in hand with respect for the procedures and standards that allow Europe to ensure humane and dignified treatment of returnees, in line with the principle of non-refoulement, and that voluntary returns should be prioritised over forced returns.

One thing has become evident during the last weeks: if we want to safeguard our area without internal borders, if we want to have an effective and humanitarian migratory policy we must ensure control over our external borders.
Controlling our borders does not equate to building walls and fences. And let me add: no one fleeing from the brutality of ISIS or the bombs of Assad will be deterred by walls and fence. Walls and fences at our internal or external borders will not solve anything in themselves. Controlling our borders does not deter people from asking for asylum. It's not a crime to cross a border to ask for asylum - but irregular border crossings must be stopped otherwise the migration flows do become unmanageable.
The European Parliament wants our external borders to be managed effectively, humanely - and jointly. The Schengen area will only survive if Member States under pressure are not abandoned and if we thoroughly implement the new system of monitoring and evaluation agreed in 2013. The management of our external borders is a collective responsibility and must be based on the principles of shared responsibility, mutual trust and solidarity.

President Juncker's proposal of an EU Border Guard System is gaining support. You, President Hollande, welcomed his proposal last week in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The European Parliament already inserted a pilot project in this year's budget. Of course it's complex and needs a lot of work and commitment. But it has real potential to clarify who does what at our external borders, to whom they are accountable, and to provide the necessary coordination and flexibility to deal with pressure points at our external borders. President Juncker, please feel encouraged by the European Parliament to make a legislative proposal very soon.

Clearly we must engage more robustly with our regional partners.

Firstly, at the forthcoming Valletta Conference we must look for solutions for combating human trafficking as much as for fighting the root causes of migration together with our African partners.

Secondly, a swift implementation of the High-Level Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean / West Balkans Route must be assured to ensure the management of migration flow.

Thirdly, relations with Turkey, a country which is hosting more than two million Syrian refugees and for many has become a gateway to Europe, is without doubt key. My impression from our meeting with President Erdogan last week was that Turkey cannot handle this crisis alone anymore. Turkey is ready to cooperate closely.

The Action plan which is now being discussed, and the newly-agreed EU package should allow for a genuine cooperation with Turkish authorities on a number of critical issues:
- fighting against traffickers who operate freely and with impunity;
- more coordination with transit countries like Greece and Bulgaria;
- encouraging Turkey - and, if needed, provide assistance - to enable the Syrian refugees to be

granted refugee status on Turkish soil. At the same time Turkey must also implement its obligations on readmission. It is time for sharing responsibilities and efforts.

The terrorist attack in Ankara last week which targeted peaceful demonstrators and left hundreds dead and wounded was a strong reminder of how volatile the situation remains in the whole region. Nothing can ever justify such violence and bloodshed which Turkey has been dragged into in recent months. During my meetings with Turkish opposition leaders and President Erdogan I have shared my concerns and have called for the resumption of the cease-fire and a return to the political process with the Turkish Kurds. Dialogue is the only way to ensure Turkey's future stability and prosperity.

You, President Tusk, told us last week in the European Parliament: that because of Iran and Russia's engagement in Syria the crisis could further aggravate.
With Russia's military intervention, the conflict in Syria has entered a new stage. The international community is called upon to deal with two wars: a civil war and a war against the so-called Islamic State which continues to pose a global security threat. Our priority must be to stop the bloodshed forcing people to flee from their homes. With 250.000 dead, almost eight million displaced within the country and four million Syrians having taken refuge in other countries, Syria is today the world's largest humanitarian disaster.

A major diplomatic initiative is needed to facilitate a political and inclusive process. The tireless involvement of the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura deserves our support as do High Representative Mogherini's efforts to promote dialogue and cooperation among Russia and the United States, as well as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. The successful diplomatic outcome on the Iranian Nuclear programme should open the door for Iran to play a constructive role in this process.

Despite all difficulties we are still hopeful that UN SRGR Bernardino Leon's mediation will in the end be crowned with success and the agreement be implemented. The EU is ready to support in all possible areas a future unity government once it is in place. European support for such a new government of National Accord is also a strong message to all Libyans to endorse the agreement and support their government. This would be an important step for setting Libya on the path of peace, reconciliation and prosperity. And a signal of hope for the whole region, as was last week's news on the Nobel Peace Prize. Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet for their decisive contribution to building a pluralistic democracy in the wake of the Revolution, is an invitation to all Tunisians to continue on this path and a reminder to all neighbours and partners to support the on-going reforms undertaken by the government.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If we fail to address migration on any of these fronts, if we let ourselves be distracted by those who spread fear, then we also fail to uphold the idea of a united Europe based on common values and

solidarity. We have already proved that we can act under pressure and in partnership. It is now our common responsibility to achieve this in the long term.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the announcement of the UK referendum I have been in regular contact with Prime Minister Cameron. As I have said in the past, the European Parliament is open to any proposal for improving the European Union. Nobody can doubt that a more democratic, more effective and more transparent Union, as well as deepening the single market by safeguarding our social model is a common goal. I recommend discussing these issues on the basis of the Five Presidents' Report, whose implementation you will discuss today, too.

The Five Presidents' Report takes a pragmatic "deepening by doing" approach. What can be done under the existing treaties should be done under the existing treaties. And it should be done now. Take the example of the Banking Union. We call on Member States to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Single Resolution Fund is up and running by the 1 January 2016. It's about fulfilling the promise made at the height of the crisis: we have to put in place safeguards that will protect tax payers' money by effectively breaking the link between banks and sovereigns.

There is no better time to start thinking about our future than now. Therefore, we should also start work on the second phase of the report, the long-term goals. And to ensure a good future for our citizens we must reform the economic governance framework. One key issue that can be addressed in the very short term is the better involvement of the European Parliament in the Semester cycle. Parliament is looking forward to playing a stronger role in a revamped European Semester aiming at a strengthened implementation of the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure, a greater focus on employment and social performance, and stronger coordination of economic policies. Regarding this Semester cycle, it is our understanding that the European Commission is checking whether the refugee crisis qualifies as an exceptional circumstance under the stability and growth pact. We will closely follow developments on this issue.

Thank you for your attention.